

DISPUTED QUESTIONS IN EDUCATION

I

Catholic Education and American Society
by ANTON C. PEGIS

II

The Eminence of Teaching
by ETIENNE GILSON

Anyone familiar with the theological and philosophical literature of the thirteenth century has met many "Disputed Questions." Each of them represents the recorded discussions and solutions of some particular problem chosen for examination by one of the mediaeval university masters. For example, we still have the well-known Disputed Questions on Truth; On the Power of God, and others, by St. Thomas Aquinas.

Disputed Questions in Education will parallel their mediaeval predecessors in two ways. Each publication will contain a discussion of a living issue in the field of education by a contemporary Catholic writer. Moreover, in keeping with the spirit of mediaeval practice, each discussion in the present collection is intended to be a critical analysis of some important current problem and to submit the findings to the judgment of other educators.

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DISPUTED QUESTIONS IN EDUCATION

Published as a contribution to Catholic Education

I

CATHOLIC EDUCATION AND AMERICAN SOCIETY

by Anton C. Pegis

PRESIDENT, PONTIFICAL INSTITUTE OF MEDIAEVAL STUDIES, TORONTO

II

THE EMINENCE OF TEACHING

by Etienne Gilson

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CATHOLIC TEXTBOOK DIVISION

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I

Catholic Education and American Society

by *Anton C. Pegis*, PRESIDENT, PONTIFICAL INSTITUTE OF
MEDIAEVAL STUDIES, TORONTO

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A FIFTIETH ANNIVERSARY is a great milestone, and I hasten to congratulate the National Catholic Educational Association on its devoted and persevering years of service. To keep the light of Catholic principles burning steadily, in season and out of season, since those far-off days before World War I, is a heroic work, and one of incalculable importance. That is why I feel both happy and honored to take part in this anniversary and to contribute, in a very humble way, to the future of Catholic education in the United States.

Now it would seem to be entirely natural to express once more, on an occasion such as this, the perennial principles on which Catholic education rests. Reminding ourselves of principles is one way in which we can renew our allegiance to them. Furthermore, there is every invitation in the present stresses and strains within American society for us to give a renewed statement of our faith as Catholic educators. But I believe that we must do more than restate our principles. Principles may be eternal and changeless, they may be our sovereign guides, yet they are of no avail if we merely pronounce them and do not embody them in ourselves as Catholic teachers living in the present and facing the responsibilities of the present. For our task is not to defend principles, since, precisely, they do not need defending. Truth has no need of us, it is we who have need of it. Our problem, therefore, is to embody eternal truth in time, in our own time and in our own day. As Catholic teachers, we must teach truth in the here and now, in the United States at mid-century. We must help to make truth a living reality in those who are our students and who will become adult American citizens in all walks of life. Furthermore, as American

citizens they will be called upon to do an extraordinary work in the world, the work of helping to build a society which will increasingly promote within itself a worthy image of man. This their education must prepare them to accomplish.

Now if the Christian work of the Catholic citizen has permanent objectives in any time or place, still in the United States we are confronted by very specific conditions and opportunities. These conditions help to sharpen our understanding of our present responsibilities as Catholic educators. I believe that, if we are willing to be courageous, we are in a position to further the best interests of Catholic education and do so in a way which is fully loyal to American traditions.

Let us begin by considering the criticisms that are directed at us from many sources. Catholic education has been called antiquated and authoritarian, divisive and un-American; it has been called anti-human because it lives in the supernatural, and anti-scientific because it is intellectual. Now the problem is not the merit or truth of these charges. For the most part, our critics do not understand what they are talking about when they discuss Catholic education. In many instances they are motivated by their own completely secularist beliefs. Many of our contemporaries are simply unable to see how they can remain fully human and even fully scientific without living in a paradise on earth. The point I wish to make is that, in the presence of our non-Catholic critics—indeed, in the presence of their very misunderstanding—we have been guilty of an omission. Perhaps because the answer was clear to us we have failed to show the human goals of Catholic education within its supernatural goals, and the temporal end within the eternal end. Our critics, therefore, have been misled into thinking of Catholicism as a supernaturalism without nature and as an other-worldly faith without reason and science. In short, many of our contemporaries think that, because the Christian man is a pilgrim to eternity and has here no lasting dwelling, he therefore has here no human home at all.

At the very least, this situation confronts us with an opportunity to reflect on the temporal mission of Catholic education.

Let me be sure, first of all, that we understand the extent of the secularism and the naturalism of some of our contemporaries. For this purpose I shall bring together a number of quotations illustrating the intellectual and spiritual temper of our age. For the sake of convenience, these quotations will be taken from two recent symposia, namely, *Religion and the Intellectuals*, published in 1950 by the *Partisan Review*, and *Freedom and Reason*, published in 1951.¹ Listen to these words, and consider their meaning and consequences.

1. . . . *there is no realm outside nature, and everything must be found within this world*”.

2. . . . the fact is that the intellectual substructure of supernaturalist religions, including Christianity, has now been washed away.³

3. I just don't seem to have the knack for religious experience; I'm tone-deaf when it comes to god.⁴

4. The concept of the supernatural is a disease of religion. . . . Christian supernaturalism is equally a disease of language.⁵

5. It seems to me urgently necessary at this time to reiterate the possibility and the necessity of addressing oneself to moral and spiritual issues in secular and this-worldly terms, and this for two reasons. The first is that a physical view of nature is now alone possible to many; the second is that these can only have a notion of morals or spirit in such a context.⁶

6. This perishing earthly creature, man, for all his lusts, confusions, and weaknesses, is on occasion an artist, a hero, a saint. . . . But this is not to say that the hero, the artist or the saint needs a theology to explain him, or that he need have one—or that it need in either case be Christian. The values, devotion to which and absorption in which have made the artist, the hero and the saint, are not dependent on the belief of these men in a providentially arranged system of nature or a divinely purposed march of history.⁷

7. Men born to perish have given their awed allegiance, their breathless adoration, to causes and things outside themselves. . . . They have rallied to movements for peace and justice, without any belief in the fatherhood of God. They have felt that men are in the same boat, though the boat has no port marked out for it, and there may be no port at all. It would, I think, be difficult to find one spiritual value or one spiritual manifestation . . . that has not equally been practiced outside the sphere of theologies and churches. Nor is there any reason to think that charity or hope, happiness or salvation, need to find their source or their support in the supernatural or in the arms of a church. Nature nourishes the spirit as the soil sustains flowers.⁸

8. . . . the philosophy of naturalistic humanism, which regards man as an integral but distinctive part of nature, as wholly a creature of natural origin and natural end, offers an adequate and fruitful basis for the social reconstruction which is essential for the emergence of patterns of human dignity on a world-wide scale.⁹

9. Ideals and ends that are out of time and so lack a natural basis can never be brought in logical and causal continuity with the means recommended to achieve them, for all such means are temporal acts with temporal consequences. The result of postulating ends that are outside of time and of postulating principles above human nature is that the choice of means, without which ends cannot be realized or tested, is lamed at the outset.¹⁰

*10. By nature man is a creature who can make his own history. But he did not make the world in which that history is open to him. Because he did not make the world is not a valid ground for the belief that any other species did—natural or supernatural. . . . Man in fact relies only on his own natural and human resources even when he claims to rely on other resources.*¹¹

There are both tougher and softer bands of doctrine on the spectrum of American naturalism that I might have quoted. It seems to me, however, that the views here quoted are representative. For my part, I also believe that they are impressive and sincere; indeed, they are impressive because they are sincere. In rejecting their errors, therefore, we must be sure not to reject the genuinely human sentiment which, in some instances at least, they contain. When St. Thomas Aquinas was in the presence of the errors of the two most illustrious commentators on Aristotle, namely, the Greek Alexander and the Moslem Averroes, he could only commiserate with them over the difficulties which beset their minds and led them into error¹².

Our contemporaries are dreaming of a society which is human, in which there are heroes and saints, in which there is reason and truth, and in which men work together for justice. And because they are dreaming of such a society, they think that, for fear of losing it, they must dream of it without God. They have closed man and nature and history within a dark island of time, and they have torn time itself from eternity, in order to cling to man with determination and, yes, even with desperation. Here are, surely, illusion and error afflicting the mind and the heart of man, tormenting his understanding and confounding his desire. But even so, illusion and error are often the mask of truth. Those who repudiate God and yet seek to live in the name of justice, of truth, and of love are pronouncing three divine names even when they do not know it. In this situation, let us consider our responsibility both with a faithful love of truth and with a fraternal concern for those who are seeking it.

These are not divorced allegiances; at least, they are not divorced if we listen to St. Thomas Aquinas. And it is to him that, at this moment, I wish to return. Perhaps this will not surprise you, because of the place which the Angelic Doctor has in the Church. But I am not turning to him merely out of respect or even gratitude, both of which I have for him in very high measure. Today I am turning to him for a reason which, I think, will surprise you. The serene St. Thomas, he of the untroubled and steady spirit, had a deep understanding of the frailty of human nature. We all know, of course, how highly he prized man and his spiritual dignity, and how richly he considered that nature to be endowed with intellectual gifts. How often have we not compared the frailty of the Augustinian man, his anguished and stormy search for truth

and certitude and beatitude, with the calm and sure Thomistic man. The comparison is undoubtedly true. Yet it is not the whole truth. For, though St. Thomas did not experience the moral and intellectual aberrations recorded in the *Confessions*, he was not blind to what an unsteady spirit man is in his very nature.

If I insist upon this conclusion, it is only to acknowledge that it has taken me a long time to realize the point. Man, as St. Thomas sees him, is a wonderfully endowed creature. He has an integrity of being and of nature; he is, within his own order, the sufficient cause of the truth which he knows. But though the Thomistic man has an integral nature, what I have not easily understood about him is how long a time he requires to become that which his nature says that he is. Or rather, as St. Thomas sees him, man must grow into himself, he must become himself before he is, fully, personally, and autonomously, a human being. Furthermore, this takes time, a rather long time. Indeed, from the point of view of what it means to be a man, St. Thomas will presently tell us that man has an astonishingly long youth. It is this long spiritual youth of man which concerns me here. It contains the human moment of Catholic education, just as it contains the point and level of contact with our contemporaries.

St. Thomas makes his own a very old tradition according to which the life of man, from birth to death, is divided into six ages. There is infancy, which lasts until the seventh year; there is childhood, which lasts until the fourteenth year; then there is adolescence, which lasts until the twenty-fifth year; after adolescence comes youth, which lasts until the fiftieth year; after youth there is old age, that is to say, the age of maturity, the age of those whom it used to be fashionable to call our elders, which lasts until the seventieth year; finally, there is advanced old age, *senium*, which I hesitate to translate as *senility*, and which lasts until the very end.¹⁸

You will have remarked how long, in this view, it takes man to reach his youth and how long he remains young. What can be in St. Thomas' mind? True enough, on Thomistic grounds I can congratulate this Association on having completed its youth; and the compliment is not without its point, since St. Thomas himself accomplished a great deal in his life and yet just managed to die a young man of forty-nine. But, to repeat, what can be in St. Thomas' mind? To this question I beg to suggest an answer; it is an answer which I have been slow to understand and to associate with that noble creature who is the Thomistic man.

May I now state more directly what I have in mind? For many years I have been studying what seems to me to be, now more than ever, a great achievement in Christian thought. I am referring to the doctrine of the unity

and nature of man as conceived by St. Thomas Aquinas. What has particularly intrigued me is the view that, though by nature man is a whole human being, he is not thereby a complete human being. To become complete, he must live; he must spend a number of years growing up both physically and mentally until he has acquired the physical maturity, the intellectual culture, and the moral development that go to make a full human being. This, you will say, is obvious, and I quite agree that the fact itself is quite obvious. After all, who of us has not experienced the slow and painful steps that we take in growing up?

But perhaps what the fact means is not quite so obvious; at least, it has not been obvious to me. It has not been easy for me to understand that, according to St. Thomas Aquinas, by as much as man is a unity of soul and body, he has a spiritual and physical dependence upon a temporal existence in order to complete himself as a human person. In other words, man must humanize the earth around him in order to reach the maturity of his own inner humanity; and he must build a civilization in the world of time, create a human society, in order to achieve within himself a human civilization and culture. Seen in this way, what we call the *world* is really man himself, his very humanity, building, by the monuments of science and art, of inventive and social progress, of moral and spiritual growth in human relations, his slow and incarnate spirit into a man. The world is man—externalizing himself in order to internalize a civilization within himself.

This is, I hope you will agree, a far-reaching consequence of the Thomistic doctrine of man. I have thought it not inappropriate to present it on this occasion and to propose it as the human basis of a Catholic philosophy of education. I say *human* because what I have said so far has to do with the nature and constitution of man and with his human development. It is a doctrine of man as man, not a doctrine of man as a Christian. But there is nothing in this notion of man which has to be denied in order to be Christianized. The Christian man is a temporal creature whose temporality consists in his becoming a man; as a Christian, however, he grows not only unto himself in order to become a man, but also unto God in order to achieve his eternal destiny. Furthermore, as grace perfects nature, so man's spiritual growth in the love of God fosters and promotes his growth as a man. We are now standing at the origin of what, following others, I shall call *Christendom*, that is to say, the ideal of a temporal life and society opened by the Christian faith to eternity itself, a human civilization that is integrally human and whose humanity is dedicated, by faith and love, to the eternal beatitude that God has revealed and made possible for all men.¹⁴

If this conclusion is correct, it contains within itself the eternal focus of Catholic education as well as the location of its present responsibilities within

American society. Indeed, three ideas come together at this point which I should like to present to you in their togetherness.

In the first place, if our critics are wrong in accusing us of an anti-human supernaturalism, let us realize how far we must go toward man and his humanity, toward time and the world of time, in our work as Catholic educators. For time is that long moment when man becomes himself; it is touched by eternity because its substance is the growing life of man. And the world is man's human home, the image of his manifold rational nature, built by his own reason, by the work of his hands, by the expression of his liberty, and by the dedication of his person. If, as Catholic educators, we are concerned with the growth of the Christian man as a man and as a Christian, then our eyes are turned toward the world of time. *There* the humanity of each person will grow; *there* the precious expression of man's liberty will be written in his acts as a person. Yet because the substance of the world of time is human, being the very life of man, our eyes are also turned, through and beyond time, to eternity; not indeed to eternity minus time, for that would be to lose man, but to eternity as the open frontier of time, illumining man's life and saving the days of his temporal existence.

So far must we go in including the human within the supernatural. It is this creature who lives in time and dreams of heaven that grace has come to save. It is this temporal creature whom we are trying to educate, so that he may open his humanity to God and find in Him his fulfillment.

But, in the second place, we must recognize as Catholic educators the intellectual humbleness of man as a spiritual creature—his humbleness and his slowness. Man's paradoxically long youth is to St. Thomas a somber fact rather than a cheerful one. For St. Thomas agrees with the old tradition of Plato and Aristotle, that the contemplation of truth is the aim of human existence on earth. This contemplation fulfills man in his rationality and in his liberty; it makes man godlike; to which St. Thomas the theologian adds that contemplation is the beginning of eternal life.¹⁶

Yet how long it takes man to rise to the fullness of his rational dignity, and how many difficulties there are in his way! The following difficulties are specifically enumerated by St. Thomas: physical evils that afflict the body, unruly passions in the soul, error and deception, ignorance of what we desire to know, uncertainty and mere opinion where we would have wished for certainty.¹⁸ Amid those difficulties it is not surprising that few men reach that end which is the contemplation of truth, and those who do, do so when they have only a small part of their lives before them.¹⁷ To St. Thomas such a conclusion goes to prove that man's beatitude is not in this life, just as the

same conclusion is witness to the surpassing fittingness of the gift of eternal life which God has made to man.

But we can scarcely stop here. For we have only to take these Thomistic notions seriously in order to see how great is our responsibility as teachers. Let it be granted that man is a noble creature, but one who matures by a physical and spiritual aging and whose growth is subject to winds of error and uncertainty. What a frail thing man is in his very nobility! Here, surely, is the burden of our vocation as teachers. We must teach the truth faithfully, yet we must teach with an enormous anxiety for those who are to receive our teaching. And if our teaching embraces the world in which man lives, because it embraces him, then our concern must be that men understand our teaching, that they share in the truth, that they possess it in their own name, and that they live and grow in it. Our teaching is not aimed at eternity, since eternity does not need to be taught, but at time, at the noble and frail humanity of man which needs truth in order to be human and which must constantly renew its life in the truth in order to remain human.

This, I submit, is our mission, to educate men and women in the building of a civilization on earth as the vehicle of their dedication to heaven. Our work is in the world; in man and his cultivation as a human person; in the humanization of the earth through the education of man according to all the spiritual height of his humanity; in the formation of Christian men and women who have the knowledge and the zeal—I mean the scientific training and the Christian vocation—to build a society that is full of the true spirit of man and that is open to the reign of Christ.

This leads me to my third point. Here in the United States we cannot properly educate our children except in view of their living as Christian citizens of this country. Our contemporaries cannot reasonably accuse us of bringing up Catholic citizens in separation from those who are non-Catholics if in our teaching we are fully and wholeheartedly committed to an educational humanism which is not other-worldly by being anti-worldly. Catholic education is other-worldly, but its other-worldliness includes both the salvation and the completion of man in time. This is the message of Catholicism as a religion, this is the charter of Catholic education, this is the principle which unites us to our fellow American citizens even when they do not see it. We repudiate nothing that is genuinely human; on the contrary, we are working to deepen, to purify, and to stabilize the humanity of man. We are not separated from anything our fellow citizens will ever do in the same direction.

For what is our dearest wish as Catholic teachers? It is to help to put a spiritual face upon American society—spiritual in that it will promote the

dignity of the human person: his search and love of truth, his growth in freedom, his communion with other men, his sense of eternity and his openness to God. For this is man, without God a reed, without reason a poor animal, but with God a rising flame of truth and liberty upon the earth. This vision of man we must constantly renew in ourselves, and we must teach it to our children. This vision we must also try to make known, with friendship and charity, to our fellow citizens. We shall then be wholly faithful to our vocation as Catholic teachers in America.

NOTES

1. *Religion and the Intellectuals, A Symposium . . . The Partisan Review*, Series Number Three (N. Y., 1950).
Since my intention in making these quotations is purely expository, I shall leave the statements anonymous.
2. *Ibid.* p. 118.
3. *Ibid.* p. 20.
4. *Ibid.* p. 91.
5. *Ibid.* pp. 66, 67.
6. *Freedom and Reason*, ed. S. W. Baron, E. Nagel, K. S. Pinson (Glencoe, Ill.: The Free Press Publishers, 1951).
7. *Ibid.* p. 126.
8. *Ibid.* pp. 126–27.
9. *Ibid.* p. 143 [author's italics].
10. *Ibid.* p. 146 [author's italics].
11. *Ibid.* p. 155.
12. *Summa Contra Gentiles*, III, 48, ad *In quo satis*.
13. *In IV Sent.*, d. 40, *Expositio Textus*. Cf. St. Isidore of Seville, *Etymologiarum* XI, ii. 2–3 (Lindsay).
14. See A. Dondeyne, *Foi chrétienne et pensée contemporaine* (2nd ed., Louvain-Paris, 1952), especially chapters v–vi, pp. 171–221; E. Gilson, *Les métamorphoses de la cité de Dieu* (Louvain-Paris, 1952), especially chapter x, pp. 269–91.
15. *Summa Contra Gentiles*, I, 2.
16. *Op. cit.*, III, 48, ad *Praeterea. Felicitatem*.
17. *Ibid.*, ad *Amplius. Inconveniens*. Cf. *Summa Contra Gentiles*, I, 4, ad *Secundum inconveniens*.

II

The Eminence of Teaching

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Given as a McCauley Lecture on April 14, 1953, at Saint Joseph College for
Women, West Hartford, Connecticut.

TWO YEARS AGO, on April 30, 1951, the Catholic world was celebrating the third centenary of the birth of St. John Baptist de la Salle, and even outside the Church many men open to the significance of his work joined in the celebration. No homage could have been more general or better deserved. It is not my intention to celebrate the sanctity of de la Salle, but I have reason to begin this lecture by mentioning his name. For were I asked to cite what appears to me as one of the higher moments in his spiritual life, I would recall an episode which even his historians sometimes forget, unless they veil it in order not to hurt our modern feelings.

We are in 1681. At that date, de la Salle has already done a great deal to foster the work of popular education. In 1679 he had already rented a house next door to his own in Rheims, and he had provided the masters of his schools with what they needed to live, including the daily food supplied to them from his own kitchen. Yet, for reasons he could not clearly discern, things were not working according to his desire, so he consulted another saintly priest, Father Barré, who had founded several poor schools in Rouen, and he asked him for advice about what he should do. Father Barré's answer was a simple one: "Do you really want to form your teachers to piety and to make them love their work on account of the good they can do? Take them into your own house and live in their company."

Seen from a distance and with modern eyes, this piece of advice does not appear particularly terrible. Since he was already supporting the masters in the house next door, why should this holy man have hesitated to welcome them

into his own home? After all, he would have saved the rent of a house. Yet Father Barré was confronting de la Salle with the hardest decision he ever had to make during the course of his life. And do you know why? Because he was being asked to take *teachers* in his own home! He himself belonged, if not to high nobility, at least to the best society of his native city; schoolteachers, on the contrary, were simply nobody; no gentleman could be expected to live with such people in his own house without raising a sort of social scandal. De la Salle knew it well, first from his own personal feelings, for he was a man of his time, but also from the feelings of his family, which was sure to consider itself publicly insulted by such a decision. He made it, however, not without a severe internal struggle, and the result was a twofold one.

On the human side, his family considered him crazy and all his younger brothers and sisters were taken away from the schools he was conducting, as if he were incompetent to care for them. This was to remain in his memory as one of the deepest sorrows of his life. On the supernatural side, his sacrifice was rewarded a hundredfold, for it became the source of the prodigious development of popular education by the Brothers of the Christian Schools. How could I forget this episode? I am indebted to it for my first Christian education.

In recalling it, however, I fully realize that this is not a wholly democratic story. It is full of social class prejudice which we are supposed to have long overgrown. But have we, at least as completely as we like to imagine? Socially speaking, I hope I can truly say yes. But I am not certain that many men have ever stopped to consider what kind of work it is to teach. I am not even certain that all teachers think of asking themselves the question. We teach because, at the time of our youth, for reasons that even then were not too clear to ourselves and that we have partly forgotten, we decided that we would be teachers. Others are teaching by religious obedience and chiefly as a way of serving the Church. Still others just found themselves engaged in the work of teaching, as much by chance as of their own will; and since they once began to teach, they continue to do it. When it is not saintly, all this is at least natural, sensible, and above any reproach, but it will certainly not do any harm for us to ask ourselves: What do we do when we teach?

This is by no means an easy question to answer, unless, of course, we content ourselves with a nominal definition of teaching activity in general. Incidentally, this is what common sense would do. To teach, any sensible man would say, is to give lessons at school or elsewhere, in or on any subject. It is to cause a person to do something—for instance, to read and write—by instruction and training. But if you had desired to hear a sensible man, you would not have invited a philosopher. The true philosopher's business is precisely to

ask questions which common sense considers settled, and, let us add, rightly so. Should it be resolved that all teaching will be suspended in schools until a world convention of teachers agrees about what it is to teach, pupils could joyfully envisage an exceedingly long vacation. The words of a philosopher can bring about no such visible effects; they are the words of a soul quietly talking to itself, but they can be heard by other souls, and invisible effects may attend the silent realization of their meaning.

Let us therefore start from common sense in order to go beyond it. To teach, the dictionary says, is by instruction to enable or to cause a person to do something. And indeed, all teachers know that they are causes. I would even suggest that, the simpler their teaching is, the better they know this. At the end of the year a professor of metaphysics may well wonder what he has caused his pupils to do that they could not already do on the very first day they entered his classroom. But there is no place for such doubt in the mind of the primary-school teacher. At the beginning of the school year he has been given a batch of boys and girls, none of whom could read a line, and, marvel of marvels, at the end of the same year they all can read. By both instruction and training, the teacher has caused them to read, and his reward is not in his salary, for quite a few other jobs would enable him to keep soul and body together, which is about all he does; his true reward is the joy he has taken, despite his hours of discouragement, in seeing his efforts progressively rewarded first by his best pupils, then by all the others. There was something they could not do, and now they all can do it, and he is the cause that they can. Here we are at once stumbling upon a truly metaphysical question. So long as we quietly enjoy teaching, no problem arises; but as soon as we begin to wonder why we enjoy it, we must ask the next question: Why is there pleasure in exercising this kind of causality?

Were we left to ourselves, we might have to wait a long time before finding an answer. We might even despair of ever finding one and quit bothering about the question. Such failures to find an answer can always be blamed on the question; we simply conclude: It does not make sense. But, precisely, this one does, and we can apply for an answer to those who asked it before us. If we believe in teaching, we should also feel willing to be taught.

The first remark to make on this point is that, properly speaking, to learn by being taught is not to invent. Improperly speaking, to invent is to teach oneself. Grown-up people are doing it constantly, and children begin to do so much earlier than we think. As soon as a human being knows something, he begins to enlarge the amount of his knowledge by a personal effort. But unless we use words in a loose way, we cannot say that this process of personal reflexion, however fruitful it may be, constitutes a real teaching. When we are learning

from a book, the problem becomes different; the book and its author are our teachers. There is teaching here because there is a teacher who is another than the pupil. This personal relation between two distinct human beings is essential to teaching; no man is to himself his own teacher in any department of human life, and we all know this even from common language. When a man says, "I am my own master," he merely means that he has no master. So also in the order of teaching: to be oneself one's own teacher does not mean not to learn, but it certainly means to have no teacher at all.

Now what is this precise relation which we find between teacher and pupil? I have just been using the word "master," and although there is some tendency to shun it in our day, or at least not to use it with the fullness of its implications, it still retains some of them. Besides, it is not used only in the language of schools. The master of the house or the master of a merchantman is supposed to have control over the house or the ship. In mediaeval universities a master was the holder of a degree giving authority to teach. Today, as in the thirteenth century, a master's control extends not only to his pupils but often to their masters. In all such cases, the notion of master implies that of authority. By its very nature it is not a democratic notion. Assuredly, we are doing our very best to make teaching as democratic as possible. Modern teachers are urged not to boss their pupils and, in point of fact, we sometimes meekly suggest to them that, did they accept to listen to us, we might perhaps teach them something. Yet, when all is said and done, the very act of teaching implies the admission of a certain inequality not indeed in nature, nor even in intellectual ability, but at least in knowledge. A man knows something, others do not know it, there is no way for the teachers to cause it to become known without putting it, willy-nilly, in the heads of his pupils. There can be no equality between a cause and its effect. To cause is to act upon; to be caused is to be acted upon, and no pedagogy will ever do anything about this.

In the case of teaching, however, this is not the whole story. When we light a wood fire, all that the wood has to do is to be burned. Wood is completely passive with respect to burning, but children are not so with respect to learning. When they enter a school, however young they may be, they have already exercised, practically at every waking moment of their lives, the extraordinary operation called cognition. Mysterious as it is, knowledge is a natural function of man. Children walk because they have legs, they breathe because they have lungs, they see because they have eyes, and they know because they have an intellect. Not only do they know, but they love knowing, just as they love breathing and walking. Let us rather say that they cannot help doing these things because no organ can help performing its natural operations.

Yet we all know that it takes them an effort to learn what they are taught in schools. The reason is that teaching in school confronts the child with a kind of knowing operation he is not yet used to performing. However simple we may try to make it, what we teach in schools always remains a typically adult learning. Left to himself, provided only he be out of early infancy, a child performs marvelous intellectual operations. The first time he says "dog," he has already seen things, perceived analogies between them, formed the abstract concept of a class, and attached a name to it. Any normal child achieves this feat without even being aware of it, and he repeats it endlessly without effort. On the contrary, as soon as we teach him to read, to write, or to count, we ask him to perform operations that are not natural to his intellect, because they are about symbols and no longer about things. The recognition of this fact accounts for the multiplication of images and pictures in modern school books; and we all know their danger as well as their usefulness. By putting pictures under the eyes of the child, we are inviting him to exercise natural cognition, which he loves to do, but, by the same token, we are postponing the time when he will have to make the very effort we must cause him to make if he is to be trained to think in an adult way. There is no natural relation between the letters of the alphabet and the sounds they are supposed to represent, nor between the words and the things they point out, nor yet between numbers and the possible concrete objects whose substitutes they are. Now these are precisely what we consider the simplest things to teach: reading, writing, and arithmetic; but they are indeed the least natural things to learn. This is the reason why learning them requires from the child such an effort, the very same kind of effort he will be asked to furnish throughout the whole course of his studies. If we think of it, most of what we are teaching consists of techniques, either scientific or linguistic, whose practical usefulness, supposing it exists, the young student cannot see. Since he cannot see it, the effort required for the mastering of such techniques is made doubly hard because, in his mind, it has no justification.

This is precisely the point at which the teacher not only has a part to perform but becomes a necessity. We should not imagine that school children know nothing more than what they are taught in schools. In fact, what we teach them is but an infinitesimal part of their knowledge, but it is precisely made up of what, without us, they would never learn. No wonder, then, that in the good old days teachers were so commonly called masters. Where an effort is required, to obtain it by persuasion is by far the best thing to do, when it can be done; otherwise, there is no other recourse than to authority, unless, of course, we renounce obtaining it.

Now, to obtain from the pupil this effort upon himself, which he can see no reason to give, except the words we say, is the highest and noblest part in the work of the teacher. It also is by far the most difficult one; so much so that we are all trying to ease the difficulty. The present tendency to make everything as easy to learn as possible is perfectly justified so long as it is a question of teaching those elementary techniques which are part and parcel of the mental equipment of a civilized man. The three Rs need not be made more difficult than they naturally are, but beyond the level of elementary education, while there is still no reason to make things harder than they actually are, we should not wish to rid our pupils of the effort necessary to learn them. First of all, the thing cannot be done; where the pupil has no personal effort to make, he needs no help and consequently no teacher. Next, if the difficulties are inherent in the teaching matter at stake, they usually can be simplified up to a point, but we cannot eliminate them without eliminating the matter itself. Hence the sometimes bitter disappointment of so many grown men and women when they remember their school years. How is it, they sometimes say, that I have had three or four years of this and that, and yet I don't know it? The reason often is that, when a subject is made easy to the point of ceasing to be what it is, it is simply not being taught.

This first way of avoiding the difficulty is a question of programs, school books, and teaching methods. If mistakes are made there, the teachers are in no way responsible for them. But there is a mistake for which some teachers are responsible, and I myself have made it so often that I feel entitled to say something about it. I beg to symbolize it by the well-known aside which escapes us after a strenuous effort to explain a difficult point: "I hope I am making myself clear." Now of course we must try to make ourselves clear; this certainly is one of the most important results to achieve for any master interested in his work, but we should not consider it *the* most important one. There is no use in displaying evidence before eyes that make no effort to see it; when they do see it, the reason is not that we made it so clear that we understood it for our pupils; sooner or later they have to understand it by themselves, and their own effort to understand it is for them the only way there is to learn it. The most scientifically pedagogical methods are bound to fail if they go against the facts of nature. In this case, the fundamental fact of nature is that no man can understand anything for another one. No master can take his own knowledge out of his own mind and put it in the head of his pupils. The only thing he can do is to help them to put it themselves into their own minds. To the extent that he has achieved this result, a teacher can justly feel conscious of having attained the proper end of his professional activity.

Abstract as it may sound, this general conclusion can help to clear up certain pedagogical controversies. For instance, if what precedes is true, there is no fundamental difference between the classical method, which proceeds by professorial expositions and lectures, and the so-called Socratic method, which proceeds by questions and answers, that is, by mode of dialogue. However you may choose to teach them, your pupils have the same kind of intellect that you have, they use the same principles of natural reason that you yourself are using; the only difference is that, in your own mind, a certain number of consequences are related to these principles and follow from them according to a certain order which you know but which your pupils do not know. What you achieve in teaching is precisely the communication of this order. Whether you do this by continuous exposition or by questions and answers does not make any difference. If you are lecturing, you know the order beforehand; if you are asking questions, these must needs be leading questions and their order is precisely your own lead. The teacher is equally active in both cases and he is so in the same way; and the learner is equally passive in both cases, in the sense that his mind has to follow the order already present in the mind of the teacher. But there again the learner's passivity comes to an end, for indeed, for him to reproduce this order is to produce it. Having to answer the objection of those who precisely denied that a master could put into the heads of pupils something that was not already there, Thomas observed that "if questions be put in orderly fashion, they proceed from universal self-evident principles to what is particular. Now by such a process knowledge is produced in the soul of the learner." So the master really causes knowledge to be in the mind of the pupil; but, Thomas goes on to say, when the learner answers the truth, "this is not because he had knowledge previously, but because *he then acquires knowledge for the first time.*"¹ And indeed, there is no other choice. The proper effect of the act of teaching is to cause a personal discovery in the mind of the pupil.

Thomas Aquinas has several times considered this remarkable problem, and apart from minor variations in the expression of his thought, he has always answered it in the same way. One of the favorite examples he uses in such cases is a comparison between the art of teaching and the art of healing. In both cases, a certain acquired learning is at the origin of the process. The physician knows what he has to do in order to heal the patient, just as the teacher knows what he has to say in order to instruct the pupil, but the physician can no more give to the patient his own health than the teacher can give his own learning to the pupil; last, not the least, the physician can do little more than to cause nature to recover health in the body of the patient, just as the teacher does nothing more than to cause the intellect to acquire knowledge

in the soul of the pupil. Only—and I hope you will remember this in view of the conclusion of this lecture—the relation of master to pupil is a still more intimate one than that of physician to patient, because it does not obtain between a mind and a body, but between two minds. What is the term of the teacher's action, Thomas has just told us, is that the pupil acquires knowledge for the first time; and this is true, but it has its counterpart on the side of the teacher. In order to cause his pupil to invent learning, he himself must invent again what he is teaching, or, rather, he must go again, before his pupils, through the whole process, now familiar to him, of the invention of each and every truth. The teacher, Thomas says, begins to teach in the same way as the inventor begins to invent.² In other words, unless he be actually thinking aloud and engaging his own intellectual activity in his lecture, the teacher does not really teach. Incidentally, this is one reason why it is doubtful that any mechanical device will ever replace the actual presence of the real teacher. Only a living intellect, patiently preceding us on the way to truth, can effectively teach us how to think.

Although I am mostly using modern words, what I am now telling you is a very old truth, or, rather, a standing one. It can easily be found in one of the disputed questions of Thomas Aquinas *On Truth*:³ “When they say that a teacher transfuses his learning to his pupil, this does not mean that the learning that is in the master is to be found afterward, numerically the same, in the pupil; it means that a learning similar to that of the master is caused in the pupil by the fact of his being taught.” In other words, there is no transfusion of learning in the sense that there are transfusions of blood. We can give our own blood to others; we cannot give them our own learning.

And yet, see what an extraordinary thing teaching is! St. Thomas Aquinas died in 1274 — that is, nearly seven hundred years ago — and on the very moment he died, his own learning died together with him. From the new life he was then beginning to live, he could no longer communicate with us by means of words. But today, men unknown to him ask themselves the question: What is it to teach? And remembering that he himself spent his whole life teaching or being taught, these men turn to him for an answer. All that is left of him in this world is paper covered with ink and sentences written in a dead language that is not even our own. We read his words, however, and suddenly what was alive in his mind seven centuries ago begins a new life in our own understanding. How is this possible? Simply because, while reading the dead signs symbolizing his thought, our own minds have themselves formed the same notions that were in the mind of Thomas Aquinas at the time when he wrote those lines. In saying the same notions, I naturally mean to say not the very same

notions which once lived in his mind but, rather, similar ones. His learning has become the cause of our learning, and still this learning is truly our own, not his. In short, Thomas Aquinas has been our teacher, and we have been his pupils, because he has caused us to produce in our own minds a learning similar to his own learning.

Here is precisely the point where the eminent dignity of teaching appears in full. Without attempting a philosophical definition of man, this at least can be said, that he is the only known species of speaking animal, and the reason why he has an articulate speech is that he has an articulate thought. The thinking power of man, which we call his intellect, is what makes him different from all the other kinds of living beings. If to teach is what we said it is, it implies the meeting of two human intellects—that is, of two human beings taken precisely in that which makes them to be men, namely, their understandings. Every other kind of job has its usefulness; consequently, it has its own dignity; but this particular one does not consist in producing material goods, in exchanging them, or in selling professional advice, or in taking care of the bodies of our fellow men. In point of fact, it is like nothing else. The relationship that obtains between the master and his pupils is that of an intellect which has already actualized its own potentialities, with another intellect whose potentialities are still to be actualized by the teaching of the master.

From this point of view, the reason for this ancient appellation should become clear. Whether or not we give him the title, the teacher is indeed a master because, owing to his intellectual maturity and his own learning, he alone is the prime cause of the whole teaching process. But the nobility of his work arises as much from its end as from its cause. What his intellect is acting upon is another human intellect, endowed with the same natural light as his own, just as noble and irreducibly personal as his own intellect is, and which, if his pedagogy is sound, he can cause to think, but for which he cannot think. It is true that in comparison with the understanding of the master, that of the pupil is in a state of receptivity or, to use the technical term familiar to philosophers, of potentiality. But, if I may be permitted to borrow once more from Thomas Aquinas one of his more felicitous expressions, I shall say that the understanding of the pupil is in a state of “active potentiality.”⁴ Without this active receptivity, Thomas Aquinas goes on to say, man could never learn anything by himself, which he certainly can do. In short, man does not have two distinct intellectual powers, the one by which to learn by himself, the other by which to learn from his teacher. The intellect by which the pupil can learn from his teacher is the very same intellect by which he can learn by himself. For indeed he has no other one. This is the true reason why the ultimate end

of our pedagogy should be to teach children to learn by themselves, because, in fact, there is nothing else we can teach.

How impractical all this probably sounds! And yet how practical it is! However heavily we load our programs, and however widely we may diversify them in order to answer the future needs of all our pupils, many of them will feel later on that they have been taught many things they did not need to know, whereas what they did need to know has never been taught to them in school. There is a safe way for us to protect ourselves against this otherwise inevitable reproach, and it is to teach our pupils to learn by themselves instead of trying to impart to them an always larger amount of learning.

Should we consider it possible to do this still more than we are already doing it, no pupil would ever regret having spent so many years in school and no master would ever wonder if he has not been wrong in his choice of a career. For we now know the answer to one of the first questions we asked at the beginning of this lecture: Why do good teachers love to teach? Why do they take pleasure in exercising this particular type of causality? The answer is that since to be is to act, all beings like to exercise causality for the same reason that they like to be. Now causality is the very act by which a being gives something of itself to another being, and this is the reason why effects naturally resemble their causes. The good teacher then loves to teach because he loves to impart to his pupils the very best thing there is in him, namely, intellectual life, knowledge, truth. The generosity inherent in the very act of being finds here its highest manifestation, and the purest kind of pleasure should naturally attend its exercise. The highest reward of teaching is the joy of making other minds similar, not indeed to ourselves, but to the truth which is in us.

To cause, Thomas Aquinas says, is to produce something which resembles its cause, and this is a universal law of nature; but if we think of it, this is a law of nature only because it is first the divine law. Before being a cause, the teacher himself is an effect of God; as such, he resembles his cause, and all his actions and operations, when properly directed, have for their own end to make him more and more similar to the sovereign cause whose effect he is. This is true not only of man but of each and every thing that is, moves, acts, and operates. In Thomas' own words: "the last end of all things is to become like God."⁵ This is what a stone does when it falls, what an animal does when it lives, and what a man does when he thinks. Only, because thought is the highest and most noble known form of activity in nature, man is the highest and noblest among the known images of God. If to teach is to cause others to think, it is to help them in becoming not only like unto their masters but unto the Master of their masters, God.

In concluding, and since I myself am an old teacher, I had better remind myself that I have not spoken about the eminent dignity of teachers but about the eminent dignity of teaching. A true teacher is what, as I hope, we all are, at least up to a point, but the ideal notion of what teaching truly is should not be considered a description of what we are; it is the yardstick that measures what we ought to be. Just as few men measure up to the eminent dignity of man, few teachers are fully equal to the eminent dignity of teaching. This is so true that when one of them is, the Church, in her truly divine wisdom, proclaims to the whole world that he is a saint: St. John Baptist de la Salle, for his infinite love of the little ones and a whole life devoted to turning them into better images of God; St. Albert the Great, on account of his unquenchable thirst for scholarship, which consists in knowing all that is knowable to man just as God knows all that is knowable to God; and Thomas Aquinas, who preceded them both on the altars for the very remarkable reason that he had dedicated his whole life to the pursuing of truth for the pure love of truth.

Now, since he himself was a professor, Thomas Aquinas once asked himself if he had not better spend his life speculating about truth, which is contemplation, rather than teaching it to others, which is action. In doing this, he was asking himself a rather embarrassing question. Not that he ever took any pride in being a professor. As he liked to say: *To be a master is not an honor, it is a task*. But like all good masters, despite some occasional grumbling, Thomas loved to teach. On the other hand, he had read in the Gospel the well-known story of Martha and Mary, and since Mary had chosen the better part, how could he doubt that contemplation was better than action? Of course he did not doubt it, but he had spent his whole life teaching the truth; he still wanted to do so and he could not persuade himself that his life would have been a better one if he had kept to himself his own accumulated learning instead of sharing it with so many disciples. So he found this remarkable way out of the difficulty: to act is not as noble as to contemplate, and it is true that to teach is to act, but to act in view of imparting to others the fruit of contemplation is more noble than contemplation alone.⁶

Majus est contemplata aliis tradere quam solum contemplari: it is a greater thing to distribute to others what one has contemplated than only to contemplate. What life, then, could be more noble than that of a teacher, if it achieves in its perfection the unity of action and of contemplation? Yes, some will say, but Thomas Aquinas was a teacher, and his answer was very clever; only the teaching of the Gospel remains what it is, and when all is said and done, Mary has still chosen the better part. Who would deny this? Certainly not Thomas Aquinas, for he was not trying to be clever; as usual, he was simply trying to

say the truth. And the truth is that if there has been a teaching of the Gospel, there also must have been a teacher. Not this time St. John Baptist de la Salle, nor St. Albert the Great, nor St. Thomas Aquinas, but He better than whom no man can ever pretend to do: the teacher and the divine model of all teachers, namely, Christ.

NOTES

1. *Summa Theologiae*, I, 84, 3, ad 3m; trans. A. C. Pegis, *Introduction to St. Thomas Aquinas* (N. Y.: Random House, 1948), p. 385.
2. *Summa Contra Gentiles*, II, 75.
3. *De Veritate*, XI, 1, ad 6m.
4. *Op. cit.*, XI, 1, Resp.
5. *Summa Contra Gentiles*, III, 20; *ed. cit.*, p. 439.
6. *Summa Theologiae*, II-II, 186, 6, Resp.